

Zverev irked by 'pat-a-cake' comment

REUTERS, New York

Alexander Zverev lashed out at Martina Navratilova after the 18-time Grand Slam champion said he had played "pat-a-cake" tennis at times during his victory over Borna Coric in the quarter-finals of the U.S. Open on Tuesday.

The German fifth seed was 6-1, 4-2 down early in his contest against the Croatian before rallying to win in four sets and reach his second Grand Slam semifinal of the year.

The 23-year-old bristled when he was told that Navratilova had said in TV commentary that he would never win a Grand Slam playing the way he had.

"Maybe she should look at my record against the big guys," he said. "Maybe she should look that I'm positive against Roger (Federer). That I've beaten Novak (Djokovic) on multiple occasions in big matches and finals. And I'm in the semis, and sometimes not playing your best and finding a way is more important than playing your best."

"She's a multiple Grand Slam champion, she's respected, but her opinion does not matter to me."

Navratilova later clarified that her comment had been about how unaggressive Zverev had been during his slow start.

"I said Sasha needs to play like he did in the 4th set, not the way he played the 1st 2 sets. It's that simple. But yeah, nice journalism, whoever asked the question. I would have answered the same way Sasha did."



'I say it's not enough'

AGENCIES



He has left a pantheon of legends trailing in his wake. Lionel Messi, Diego Maradona, the Brazilian Ronaldo, even the great Pele -- none have scored as many goals for their country as Cristiano Ronaldo. As he became the first non-Italian player to cross 100 goals, possibly the greatest milestone of them all is now within touching distance.

"Records are part of me," Cristiano Ronaldo once claimed. "I don't follow the records. The records follow me."

On Tuesday, Ronaldo rattled home a superb first-half free kick against Sweden for his 100th international goal -- and struck another spectacular effort in the second half to seal a 2-0 Nations League win in Stockholm.

The 35-year-old has set his sights on Ali Daei's record of 109

101 NOT OUT

What's perhaps most impressive about Ronaldo's tally is that only 17 of his 101 goals have come in friendlies, though he has certainly beaten up on the European minnows along the way. Seven of his goals have come vs. Lithuania and Sweden, while he's scored five apiece against Andorra, Armenia, Latvia and Luxembourg. Digging further into his century of goals, he has nine international hattricks, 30 goals in World Cup qualifying and 31 in European Championship qualifying. He's delivered seven goals on the World Cup stage and another nine at the Euros. Forty-seven of Ronaldo's strikes have come at home, 39 away, and 15 on neutral territory. Ronaldo has scored in 66 games, with Portugal going on to win 55 of them. They have drawn five and lost six. Ronaldo is far and away the active leader in international goals in men's soccer. India's Sunil Chhetri (72) and Argentina's Lionel Messi (70) are the next closest.

international goals but once again reminded that he is not obsessed with records. "I managed to beat this milestone of 100 goals and now (I'll go) for the record. It's step-by-step. I am not obsessed because I believe the records come in a natural way," Ronaldo said.

However, he didn't hesitate to term the new achievement historic, posting on Instagram: "Huge pride in this historic goal for our national team! When they tell me I can reach 100, I say it's not enough..."

101 goals for Portugal." Having netted five times in his previous encounters against the Swedes, only a fool would have bet against him writing more history in the Swedish capital.

"Yesterday he scored six or seven (free kicks) like that in training and today it went exactly the same way. It's so good to have Cristiano on the team," Portugal midfielder Bruno Fernandes said.

Ronaldo enjoyed his latest goals at Sweden's Friends Arena,

although the Portugal captain insisted he had no point to prove.

Portugal thrashed Croatia 4-1 last week without their talisman and that prompted suggestions that Portugal maybe better off without the goal-scoring machine.

"I didn't follow the comments. It's an opinion. I knew I had left a mark at this stadium and I knew that, if I played, I would leave a mark again. I don't care about provocations. What I have done in my career speaks for itself. No, I have to prove nothing to anyone, and when I have to prove it, I show it on the pitch," the Juventus forward said afterward.

On his milestone goal, Ronaldo said: "I am very happy. Firstly, because the team won, which was the goal we had. Then the 100 mark and then the 101, with two goals, makes me very happy. Now the future is only for God. I feel good, I feel good for playing with these young players."

France triumph in six-goal thriller

AGENCIES



France earned a rollercoaster 4-2 home win over Croatia in an entertaining top-tier Nations League match on Tuesday with the outcome a carbon-copy of their clash in the 2018 World Cup final.

The French, who were down 1-0, turned things around in remarkable fashion. Their first came courtesy of some sublime link-up play between Anthony Martial and Antoine Griezmann, with the latter scoring. Two minutes later, Martial's goalbound shot was deflected in.

The Croatians suffered their second successive defeat after a 4-1 drubbing at European champions and Nations League holders Portugal.

"We played with greater style, apart from the first 30 minutes when we were dominated physically and were not precise enough technically," France manager Didier Deschamps told TF1 television. "I changed seven players between the first and the second game. This system needs to be repeated in order to be integrated by the players."

Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic was unhappy with his team's defending, especially at set pieces. "We're letting in goals far too easily," Dalic told reporters. "It's a fact, just like in Portugal we keep leaving rival players unmarked in dead ball situations. We have a lot of work to do if we are going to be competitive in the Nations League and in next year's Euros."

Belgium and Portugal secured comfortable wins on Tuesday night while England and Denmark played out a goalless draw. Harry Kane thought he won it for England in stoppage time, only to see his goalbound shot cleared off the line.



Anthony Martial (R) and Antoine Griezmann (C) combined to great effect at the top of a mesmerising France attack against Croatia on Tuesday. PHOTO: TWITTER



(From L-R) Bangladesh cricketers Soumya Sarkar, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mustafizur Rahman are engaged in a lively chat as individual training resumed at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday after a six-day gap. Despite the coronavirus scare among staff and one of their own, Saif Hassan, testing positive, players were eager to get back to business and get ready for the upcoming tour of Sri Lanka. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

New normal the regular now

NABID YEASIN



Young Bangladesh opener Saif Hassan tested positive for coronavirus on Tuesday. But did that change any plans in proceedings for other cricketers? The simple answer is no. Players yesterday again resumed individual training at different BCB facilities across the country following a few days' gap after a few members of the support staff had displayed coronavirus-like symptoms.

Will things ever be the same again? We do not know. But what we do know is everything will go on despite any abnormalities.

When coronavirus had forced shut all sporting activities in the country back in March, a wave of panic had engulfed everyone; and rightly so as people were just finding ways to fight the virus. But as days passed, people gathered more knowledge about ways to cope with the virus and normalcy gradually returned.

Yes, this is now the new normal -- people carrying on doing everything they used to while coping with the virus.

It has been a while since cricketers started individual practice with BCB providing facilities while maintaining safety measures. Even one of the five

bilateral series postponed due to the pandemic has now been slated in the form of the three-Test tour of Sri Lanka next month.

The BCB started conducting Covid-19 tests for players and staff, a prerequisite in the new-normal era prior to any tours. Bangladesh opener Saif and BCB head of Physical Performance Nick Lee tested positive while showing no symptoms leading up to sample collections. And as protocol entails, they will now go into isolation until another test.

The BCB has lined up three more phases of testing scheduled for September 18, 21 and 24, with the final test being done 72 hours before the Tigers board the Sri Lanka-bound flight. It is likely that more cricketers and management staff will test positive for coronavirus.

But should that halt all the proceedings? The recommended and wise path would be to carry on while maintaining safety protocols -- isolating the infected players and monitoring them till their next test.

Take Pakistan's recently-concluded tour of England as an example. A series that was labelled by Misbahul Haq, Pakistan's head coach, as a 'very important series both for Pakistan and the world' after its completion, saw Pakistan touring UK despite having as many as ten coronavirus-positive players ahead of the tour.



All those players had to comply with protocol and a few of them were later allowed to join the squad after testing negative.


Even other disciplines are planning on going ahead with regular activities while complying with the virus protocols. The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is looking at ways to start the domestic league despite 18 players and an official testing positive ahead of their training camp for World Cup qualifiers. That camp was eventually halted after FIFA and AFC postponed the matches in light of deterioration of the coronavirus situation in Asia.

Taekwondo, meanwhile, became the first discipline in the country to make a comeback with its poomsae competition earlier this month. Even news of high-profile international football players like Neymar and Kylian Mbappe testing positive for the virus are not seeing any unprecedented halt in football leagues or competitions anymore.

Athletes testing positive and then being isolated till the respective federations give them green light to return is now a part of the new normal as everything keeps on going.


Perhaps it is time for the athletes, much like everyone else, to acknowledge the truth that the world is moving on and there is no point being scared anymore.





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